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SERVICE

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BICENTENNIAL MUSINGS

Food Shopping, 1776 Style. In keeping with a popular fantasy during this Bicentennial Year, imagine it is 1776 and you are shopping for food supplies in that bustling city of Philadelphia. You buy in volume--in gallons and barrels and hundred pounds. The reason: You don't get to the store so often and--convenience foods being in the future--you make your recipes from scratch. You note that flour is up to 9 shillings and 4 pence per 100 pounds and sugar demands 31.90 shillings a 100 pounds. That other favorite sweetener, molasses, costs 1.05 shillings a gallon. A barrel of beef (about 100 pounds), salted and brined, has climbed to 34.33 shillings and a like amount of pork, similarly treated, sells for 39.07 shillings. A gallon of rum is 1.84 shillings. You consider butter at 5 shillings a pound, but might heed the merchant's advise that the price is "excessive" and that the "buyer look elsewhere." You try to stretch your shillings because you know they are hard to come by. Common laborers make 3 shillings a day; carpenters, along with joiners and riggers of the shipbuilding trade, earn 5 shillings a day. A tailor receives 3 shillings plus room and board for making a suit, whether it takes a day or a week to do the job. A workday is 12 hours long--with no coffee break--and a week's work is 6 days. Another way to look at it: A skilled laborer works 3 hours to buy a gallon of molasses, 8 days and 5 hours for a 100-pound barrel of beef, 1 day and 3 hours for a pound of butter, and 6 hours for a gallon of rum. For a rough comparison, in 1976 terms, a shilling was about 25 cents and a pence, 2 cents.

THE RETURN OF THE ELM

Hopeful Hybrid. The elm tree may soon return to Elm Street, USA. Urban elm, a hybrid developed by scientists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service, is resistant to Dutch elm disease. This fungus is the culprit blamed for doing in those stately elms that once lined streets and roads and shaded parks and lawns from the Great Plains to the Atlantic. Not only does Urban elm resist Dutch elm disease, it stands up under drought, pollution, soil compaction and limited root space. Current propagation of the hybrid should allow limited commercial stocks to be available in about 3 years. Happily, Urban elm is not alone in the fight against Dutch elm disease. Researchers are still at work to develop other resistant hybrids and methods to help existing elms fight the disease.



SPRING FOOD PREVIEW

Retail food prices will rise very little from winter levels. In 1975, marketing costs accounted for three-fourths of the rise in retail food prices. These costs will make up most of any increases this spring, too. In contrast, prices farmers get for food commodities have declined, on the average.

Significant increases the past few months in fed-beef supplies have lowered farm prices for Choice beef, but retail prices, while being held down, have not dropped as much as the farm price. This spring, expect retail prices for all types of beef to average 3-5 percent above winter's prices if marketing margins stay as wide as they are now. Considering the trend toward more production of grain-fed cattle, the main source of Choice grades, you may see hamburger prices rising more rapidly than prices of Choice cuts.

Pork producers are expanding output, but supplies are still below levels of last spring. Retail pork prices will still be higher than in recent years, but will decline if pork supplies increase as expected. Larger beef and poultry supplies will also help hold down pork prices.

Look for broilers to cost you about what they did in January-March. Producers expanded output sharply in early 1976 and they're expected to produce 10 percent more broilers this spring than last.

Although 15-20 percent more turkeys will be available for market this spring than a year ago, total supplies will be about the same because of reduced cold-storage stocks. So, you'll pay a little more for turkey than you did during the winter.

Higher prices are likely for most types of fish. Cold-storage holdings of frozen fish items have been reduced, and canned salmon and sardine supplies continue tight.

Look for retail egg prices to rise some in early spring as demand increases for the holidays. Egg prices will drop afterwards, as they usually do, but probably will average above last spring's prices during April-June. Higher prices for meat and generally improved economic conditions will bolster egg prices.

We are back to eating nearly as much sugar as we used to. Expect to pay slightly more for packaged sugar. Wholesale sugar prices have been rising a little recently; world consumption is returning to normal; and supplies are a bit tighter.

Dairymen are producing more milk as a result of lower feed costs, higher support prices, and higher market prices. This uptrend in production will continue at least through June. Retail prices of dairy products won't change much from winter. Fluid milk prices could well stabilize at prices reached in early spring. Butter and cheese may even cost a bit less since more milk is available to make these products. Rising meat prices, plus higher consumer incomes, should boost cheese sales.

The huge onion crop expected from Texas will push prices far below winter's prices. Fresh potatoes will probably cost moderately more than in winter; the carryover in potato supplies doesn't equal the record quantity available last season. Potato products--frozen, granules, and flakes, etc.--will cost about the same or a fraction of a cent more per pound than in winter.

As for canned vegetables, look for plenty of peas, beets, corn, snap beans and tomato products at prices down from a year ago. Last year a heavy pack and a buildup in stocks ran into decreased demand. The carryover stock of canned and frozen vegetables is the largest in 4 years. The demand for canned and frozen vegetables has increased as a result of a recovery in general economic activity, retail price reductions last winter, and the gradual disappearance of home-preserved vegetables. The trend is likely to continue during spring. Price reductions at wholesale may have run their course, but the heavy supplies could hold down price increases for canned peas, snap beans, and certain concentrated tomato products. There will be ample supplies of all the more popular frozen vegetables at prices little different from winter's.

With very active demand for both canned and fresh mushrooms, prices may increase further.

Pinto, kidney, and other colored beans will continue to be an economical choice. White beans have been higher priced than in 1974/75 because of sharply reduced supplies.

Apple prices, though likely to increase seasonally, will be cheaper than last spring because of a good fall harvest. Grape and apricot harvests were larger, too. Fresh strawberries will be up in price.

Continuing increases in marketing costs, plus increased demand from shoppers, could keep prices of processed fruit higher than usual. Cold-storage holdings of most frozen fruits are below a year ago, which suggest prices will be higher than last spring. Look for good buys among canned noncitrus fruits; you may pay less than a year ago since these supplies are larger. Dried prunes and raisins might cost a bit more because of strong demand. Processed citrus fruits will be more abundant because of record Florida grapefruit crop and substantial diversion to processing of freeze-damaged California oranges. Prices of frozen concentrated orange juice, climbing since fall, will stabilize unless demand increases sharply.

Shortening, salad dressings, cooking oils, and margarine will probably cost less than in winter because of lower wholesale prices. Although these items primarily consist of soybean oil, use of imported palm oil has been growing, predominately in shortening.

Fairly stable prices are likely for cereal and bakery goods, with a slight rise possible before summer. Costs of ingredients could go up some, along with marketing costs.

There is no break in sight for coffee drinkers. The world supply may be the smallest since World War II because of the Brazilian freeze, the earthquake in Guatemala, and the Angolan civil war. Retail prices are expected to rise sharply in coming months.

THE FOREST--PRIMEVAL TO MODERN

Subject Of A New Movie. The Nation is celebrating its Bicentennial; federal forestry, its Centennial. In honor of both, USDA's Forest Service has produced an exciting new film, "Roots of the Nation". It illustrates the important role forests have played in the development of our Nation and the continuing effort being made to conserve our only renewable natural resource. The color film, with its spectacular shots of forest scenery and excellent narrative, will be of interest to almost anyone--from the dedicated conservationist to those who just like to look at beautiful views. Copies of the 16mm film, which runs 28½ minutes, are available from film libraries at State land-grant universities, or may be purchased at cost from the Motion Picture Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

THE HOUSE FLY

Deserves No Welcome. Among the harbingers of warm weather is that faithful returnee and pest, the house fly. On days when windows are flung open to warm breezes, the heaviest traffic pattern is children in and out of the front door, and a picnic is the pleasant way to eat--those are the days when house flies are at their active worst. Adding injury to intrusion, house flies are a known danger. The pests have the unhealthy habit of spreading to man and animal, disease germs picked up from the materials the flies breed in, feed on, and walk on. When gaining access to man's food, the little beasts contaminate it by insolently tramping around on it with hairy legs and feet. All-in-all, there is little, if any, good that can be said of house flies; their company is to be avoided. Some ways to control these disease carriers--more practical and effective than the time-consuming practice of shaving their little legs--are offered in the USDA leaflet, "The House Fly: How To Control It" (L-390). Copies of the leaflet are for sale at 25 cents each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

SUITING THE FAMILY

Costs More. Americans spent an estimated \$369 a person on clothing and shoes in 1975, say consumer specialists of USDA Agricultural Research Service. That's \$19 more than they spent in 1974. Higher prices rather than increased buying accounted for about three-fifths of the increase.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write Lillie Vincent, Editor of Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Special Reports Division, Room 459-A, Washington, D.C. 20250, or telephone 202-447-5437.
